

again for Al Qaida. Al Qaida is greatly weakened since 2001. As a matter of fact, they at one point declared the most central front in the war on terror in Iraq, where they're doing very poorly.

And they're not doing so well here either. Now, they can hide in remote regions. They can hide, but we will stay on the hunt, and we will keep the pressure on them, because it's in the people—the peaceful people of Afghanistan's interest, just like it's in the interest of this country.

And so, is there still difficult days ahead? Absolutely. But are the conditions a lot better today in Afghanistan than they were in 2001? Unquestionably, undoubtedly, they're better.

*[President Karzai spoke in Dari, and no translation was provided.]*

**President Karzai.** Mr. President.

**President Bush.** Steven Lee [Steven Lee Myers, New York Times].

### **Troop Levels in Afghanistan**

**Q.** Thank you, Mr. President. If I could ask President Karzai first. We just came from Iraq, where they've signed an agreement outlining a security arrangement, and it includes a withdrawal of American forces within 3 years. I wonder if you envisioned a similar kind of arrangement where—would you like to see a scheduled withdrawal or a timetable of withdrawal for the foreign forces who are in Afghanistan? Thank you.

**President Karzai.** Well, sir, Afghanistan is in a cooperative arrangement with the United States and the rest of the international community. The decision in Afghanistan is to continue our cooperation with the international community until we have defeated terrorism and extremism and the threat that emanates from them to us, to our neighbors, and to the rest of the world. And Afghanistan will not allow the international community to leave it before we are fully on our feet, before we are strong enough to defend our country, before we are powerful enough to have a good economy, and before we have taken from President Bush and the next administration billions and billions of more dollars—[laughter]—no way that they can let you go.

**President Bush.** Yes, you better hurry up, in my case. [Laughter]

Thank you, sir. Thank you, all.

**President Karzai.** Most welcome, most welcome. Take care. Thanks very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 7:53 a.m. at the Presidential Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David D. McKiernan, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; former President Pervez Musharraf and President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan; and former Prime Minister and Opposition Leader Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, who was killed in a suicide attack in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, on December 27, 2007. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this press conference.

### **Remarks on Lighting the Hanukkah Menorah**

*December 15, 2008*

Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. You may have heard I've had a pretty eventful weekend. [Laughter]

So I slipped out Saturday night to Andrews Air Force Base, boarded Air Force One, and landed in Baghdad, Iraq, on Sunday afternoon. It was an unbelievable experience—it really was—to stand next to the President of a democracy and hold my hand over my heart as they played the national anthem in front of one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. I then had—[applause]. And then I had the honor to thank our brave troops who have helped make the transformation in Iraq possible.

This morning we landed in Afghanistan. I spoke to American forces serving courageously to make sure that Afghanistan never becomes a safe haven from which the killers could launch attacks on the homeland.

And then I met with President Karzai, who is determined to help the young democracy survive. And so he said, "Why don't you hang around for a while?" And I said, "Well, you don't understand. [Laughter] I need to get back to the White House for an important event." [Laughter] The Hanukkah reception is always one of the most special events of the season. Laura and I are pleased to be with so many friends. And we are honored

to gather with leaders of the Jewish community to celebrate our final Hanukkah here in the White House.

I want to thank our Attorney General for joining us. General, I appreciate you and Susan joining us. I am proud to be here with one of America's great United States Senators, Joe Lieberman—[*applause*—his greatness made possible by his wife Hadasah, I might add. [*Laughter*] And one of the young leaders of the United States Congress, Eric Cantor, and his wife Diana. And we're proud to be here with Kol Zimra as well, who will perform later.

The story of Hanukkah recalls the miraculous victory of a small band of patriots against tyranny and the oil that burned for eight nights. Through centuries of exile and persecution, Jews have lit the menorah. Each year, they behold its glow with faith in the power of God and love for His greatest gift, freedom.

This Hanukkah we celebrate another miraculous victory, the 60th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel. When President Harry Truman led the world in recognizing Israel in May of 1948, many wondered whether the small nation could possibly survive. Yet from the first days of independence, the people of Israel defied dire predictions. With determination and hard work, they turned a rocky desert into fertile soil. They built a thriving democracy, a strong economy, and one of the mightiest military forces on Earth. Like the Maccabees, Israel has defended itself bravely against enemies seeking its destruction. And today, Israel is a light unto the nations and one of America's closest friends.

This evening we have the great privilege of celebrating Israel's 60th anniversary and Hanukkah in a very special way. Thanks to the generosity of the Truman Library, we are fortunate to light the menorah presented to President Truman in 1951 as a symbol of friendship by Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion.

A decade after President Truman received this gift, he visited Prime Minister Ben-Gurion for one of the last times. As they parted, Ben-Gurion told the President that as a foreigner he could not judge President Truman's place in American history, but the

President's courageous decision to recognize the new State of Israel gave him an immortal place in Jewish history. Those words filled the President's eyes with uncharacteristic tears. And later, Ben-Gurion would say he rarely had seen somebody so moved.

And so tonight I'm deeply moved to welcome the grandsons of these two great men—Clifton Truman Daniel and Yariv Ben-Eliezer—to light the Truman menorah together.

Laura and I wish all the people of Jewish faith a happy Hanukkah and many joyous Hanukkahs in the years ahead. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:30 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Jalal Talabani of Iraq; President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; Susan Mukasey, wife of Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey; and entertainers Kol Zimra. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

### Remarks Following a Meeting With President Elias Antonio Saca Gonzalez of El Salvador

December 16, 2008

**President Bush.** Mr. President, *bienvenido de nuevo*. I am honored to have you back. I appreciate your friendship, and I appreciate your strong leadership for the people of our close ally, El Salvador.

We've had a very good discussion. First, I want to thank you for your support of freedom in Iraq. You and—have been steadfast in recognizing that freedom is the way to help build lasting peace.

I appreciate very much the fact that your country is a vibrant democracy. You've been steadfast in your support for your—the right of your people to express themselves in a free society, and I applaud you for that strength.

I want to thank you very much for investing in your people. You're a—we've got a partnership through the Millennium Challenge Corporation. And part of your commitment was honest government and the investment in the health and education of your people. And you've honored that agreement. I thank you very much for understanding that the benefits of trade are good for your people